

Full Value Contract

Use this discussion guide with youth to establish group norms and common expectations. Write the agreement on a piece of paper which youth read, sign, and follow for the duration of the program experience. Depending on the length and location of the program, the contract can be large and posted at the location or small and mobile. This activity was contributed by the Voyageur Outward Bound School.

Why This Matters

- Setting clear expectations is an important step to create a positive social and emotional learning environment.
- Youth input fosters youth ownership and engenders a greater sense of commitment to the ground rules and shared values.
- Establishing norms and agreements that are grounded in a group's own words and experiences helps create a safe and inclusive environment.

Getting Started

- Materials: Paper and writing utensils (pens or markers). You may want additional paper for a rough draft during brainstorming.
- Time: 30-60 minutes
- As a facilitator, think in advance about what rules you want to have in the agreement. These might be policies like no cell phones or swear words. Also, know what the group goals are so that the expectations in the agreement support those goals. As you reflect on values and expectations that are important to you as a leader, consider how your own identity, culture, and past experiences are shaping your values. The

required expectations that you bring to the contract should be minimal so that there is ample room for youth to add the values and expectations that are most important to them.

- The content can be general or specific. One group might have "I will keep my electronics put away" while another group may need more explicit guidelines "I will only use my cell phone if I am communicating with a parent or guardian." The group could take a different approach by naming social and emotional skills that are important to the group experience "I will try things I have not done before" or "I will pay attention."
- Pick a discussion location that is comfortable and will be free from distractions.

How To Do It

- 1) Introduce the contract as a way to be clear about what is expected from everyone. Both youth and facilitators will be committing to the contract.
- 2) Facilitate a conversation using some of the following questions.
 - When have you been part of a group that felt really supportive? (This could be any type of group experience—at home, school, church, camp, in your program, etc.).
 - What did you like about the group? What made it feel supportive for you?
 - What did the people in the group (including the adults) do to make it feel that way?
 - What did you do in the group to make it feel supportive for others?
 - When have you been part of a group that was not supportive?
 - What happened in that experience that you didn't like? What did the people in the group (including the adults) do to make it feel that way? How did your actions contribute to the negative group dynamics?

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- 3) Begin taking notes (in a way that is visible to everyone) when you turn the conversation to the current group experience.
 - What is important to you about this group experience? (Identify that answers to this question are a way to talk about values.)
 - What expectations do you have for others? Yourself? Your instructors?
 - If the group is struggling to address values and expectations, name specifically that safety and relationships are going to be group values. Ask,
 - What can we do to ensure safety?
 - What can we do to build relationships?
- 4) Ask youth to identify their top 2-3 expectations for youth, self and staff. Guide the group towards consensus (See **Consensus Building activity** if you want to spend additional time on this process. If the group has trouble reaching consensus, consider how value differences might be influencing the conversation. Questions such as “Why is this important to you?” can be helpful in identifying underlying values.) Explain that we can only control our own actions, not the actions of others. The success of this group is up to each person doing what everyone has agreed is important. Rewrite each expectation in the form of a personal statement like, “I will...” Get input from youth as you talk through revising the priority expectations. Instructors should also explain how they will meet the expectations in the group contract by adding a personal statement, “As an adult, I will...”
- 5) Shift the conversation to accountability.
 - What does accountability mean? Ensure that the group has a common understanding of accountability before moving on.
 - How can we hold each other accountable to the group values and expectations?
 - If your group is mature enough, consider talking about instructor accountability as well.
 - How will the instructors be accountable to the group values and expectations? What is an appropriate way for youth to raise questions or concerns about instructors?

- 6) After youth have verbally agreed to a set of rules for their full value contract, have youth rewrite the contract. Ensure that there is space available for everyone to sign the contract.
- 7) Have youth each read and sign the contract.
- 8) If youth participants are unwilling to sign the contract at the end, don't push it. Talk to youth in a 1:1 setting to better understand their reasons. If satisfactory resolution cannot be reached, consider having a parent meeting to weigh the youth's continued involvement in the program.

Take It Further

- If it is a multi-session experience, revisit the contract at regular intervals (at least weekly to start). Any of the following questions can be used to reflect on the full value contract, as a group discussion or for an individual journaling activity:
 - How do you feel about the group experience we've been having lately? Is it matching the values we set in our contract?
 - Is the contract working to make this the group experience we said we wanted? Why or why not? How could the contract be more effective?
 - What is an example of a way that you have lived up to the expectations in the contract?
 - We had a great session, what's an example of someone else who you observed making choices to honor the contract?
 - I've noticed that _____ has been happening a lot (name a breakdown in the expectation). Has anyone else observed this? It seems to be in conflict with these values (name specific contract values). What can we do to get back in line with our values?
 - Are there any values that need to be updated?